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VINDICATION

OF

PUBLIC AND SOCIAL WORSHIP;

CONTAINING

AN EXAMINATION of the EVIDENCE concerning
it in the NEW TESTAMENT,

AND

OF MR. *WAKEFIELD*'S ENQUIRY into its
PROPRIETY and EXPEDIENCY.

BY WILLIAM PARRY.

My Name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in EVERY PLACE
Incense shall be offered to my Name, and a pure Offering.

MAL. i. 2.

I will therefore that Men pray EVERY WHERE, lifting up holy Hands.

1 TIM. ii. 8.

L O N D O N:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE author of the following piece did not see Mr. Wakefield's pamphlet before the last week in June: a circumstance which it may be necessary to mention as an apology for the late appearance of this tract, in the controversy concerning the propriety of religious worship.

Little Baddow, Essex,

Aug. 2, 1792.

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OF

PUBLIC AND SOCIAL WORSHIP.

PUBLIC worship has generally been esteemed of great importance, to the cause of Religion and human happiness; and accordingly it has been observed by Christians of every denomination, though with great variety as to its mode or form. It might have been expected, that the propriety of a practice, which has for its object the promotion of piety and the honour of the Divine Being, and which may be traced back in the Christian church, as far as the authentic documents of ecclesiastical history conduct us, would have remained indubitable. The present, however, is the age of inquiry, in which opinions and practices long established, are dragged forth from the covert of antiquity, or the sanctuary of custom, to pass the ordeal of discussion. But from this fiery trial, whatever may be its partial effects,

no general, or permanent evil is to be apprehended by the friends of religion, to any thing truly valuable or important to it's interests. By submitting every thing to the test of impartial examination, the latent powers of the human mind are roused to exertion, the dormant evidences of truth are called forth to public view, what is false or spurious is separated from what is true and genuine, and what rests upon the immoveable basis of revelation, distinguished from that which stands on the weak foundation of custom, or the precarious ground of hypothesis. Thus in the wise arrangements of Providence, the cause of truth and genuine christianity acquires additional strength from fair discussion, whether excited by the desire of improvement, the doubts of scepticism, or the affectation of novelty. The storms which shake the tree of knowledge do but cause its roots to strike deeper, and its branches to flourish with renewed strength and verdure.

The attack made by Mr. Wakefield's pamphlet, on the propriety of public worship, has the merit of being new; but by summoning the friends of religion to it's defence, in a quarter which had not before been assailed, the conflict will probably terminate in establishing, not only the lawfulness, but the *obligation* of social worship upon invincible arguments: and thus instead of proving an injury to the cause of practical religion, it will be the accidental occasion of strengthening one of it's bulwarks against future assaults. The attack indeed has not been *formidable*, but the just fame which Mr. Wakefield has acquired in some of the walks of literature, may render it useful to discuss fully, what would scarcely have deserved reply, had it fallen from a less learned pen: From his established reputation, and the loss he has sustained by
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following his convictions, he is entitled to full credit for the purity of his motives, even in this singular performance. But, neither a regard for literary eminence, nor that respect which is due to integrity, should influence the human mind to receive opinions without sufficient evidence of their truth; or lead it to depart, from what has been long considered as an important branch of religious practice, unless it be *proved* to be unscriptural and injurious.

As Mr. Wakefield's opinions respecting public worship, appear to me to have no foundation in scripture, and what he has advanced in support of them to be totally inadequate to his purpose, I shall freely examine, and endeavour to refute whatever has the appearance of argument in his pamphlet; and attempt to establish the propriety and expediency of public worship, from the evidence of the scriptures, and the general nature and design of Christianity. In doing this, it may be convenient to follow Mr. Wakefield in the method he has pursued, especially as the topics he has chosen, the example and precepts of Christ, and the practice of the apostles, will furnish irrefragable evidence in *favour* of public worship, and lead to conclusions directly *opposite* to those he has drawn from them. This evidence therefore, shall be collected, under the respective articles to which it belongs, after the examination of Mr. Wakefield's positions. It may be only necessary here to observe, for the sake of such readers as may not have seen his tract, that the question relates to public or social *worship* only, not to public instruction. For the latter Mr. Wakefield is an advocate, but the former he pronounces to be "Unauthorised by Christianity, and inconsistent with it." *

SECTION I.

ON THE PRACTICE OF OUR SAVIOUR HIMSELF.

MR. WAKEFIELD's first section, is employed in an attempt to support his position, from the practice of our Saviour. On this ground I cheerfully join issue with him, and if I can find nothing in the practice of our Lord, to countenance and support social or public worship, will "retire with shame from the field of contest, and resign the victory." The first text he adduces is the following. "*And, when Jesus had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come he was there alone.*"* From this passage Mr. Wakefield would infer, that our Lord did not approve public worship, or he would have used it before he dismissed the multitude. The text asserts no more, than that Jesus chose to be alone at his *private* devotions. And it is extraordinary indeed, to infer, that because Jesus was a friend to *private* devotion, he was an enemy to *public*! Yet this is Mr. Wakefield's argument from this text, if there be any argument in what he has advanced concerning it. As to his declamation concerning the propriety and wisdom of our Lord's using social worship with the multitude, previous to their dismissal, had he been friendly to the practice, it might all have been spared, if our author had patiently consulted the context, where a very satisfactory reason is suggested, why the people should be sent away as soon as the meal by which

* Matth. 14—23.

they were miraculously refreshed was ended. The benevolent Saviour was too much the friend of man, to introduce even worship itself, when it would have been *unseasonable*. The same benevolence which influenced him to feed them by miracle, led him to dismiss them as soon as they were fed. We are told by the Evangelist, that “ *When it was evening his disciples came to him saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past, send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves victuals.*” * It was evening, they were in a desert, night was approaching, and many weary steps must be made by numbers of them before they could arrive at their habitations. Send them away, said the disciples, that they may buy victuals; Not so, replied the Friend of man, let them be refreshed, and then dismissed. Humanity required, that as soon as the meal was over they should depart, which they did. But even on this occasion, there was an act of social worship, for Jesus “ *Looking up to heaven, blessed and brake*” † the provision. Upon Mr. Wakefield’s principles, ought not our Lord, instead of thus reminding them of their dependence on the Author of all good, to have left them “ *To the secret impressions and undisturbed impulse of their own minds?*” ‡ But Jesus was wise as well as good. His example taught them to acknowledge the Divine beneficence, and by dismissing them immediately, under the impression which the miracle, and the short act of social worship that preceded it made upon their minds, they would depart better disposed to indulge improving meditations, than if they had gone away under the craving sensation of hunger, or their stay had been protracted until the gloom of night,

* Matth, xiv. 15.

† Verse 19.

‡ Page 15.

and the solitude of a desert had awakened painful apprehensions. *

In support of his hypothesis Mr. Wakefield next quotes these words, "*Then cometh Jesus with the disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto them ; Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder. And he went forward a little, about a stone's cast ; and kneeled down and prayed.*" † This passage, however, only proves that our Lord, under the distressing state of mind he was then in, chose to pour out his

* In a note under the above passage, page 14, Mr. Wakefield has laboured to expose what he calls " the rigorous discipline of Dissenters," especially in some *dissenting academies*. He ought however to have well ascertained the *fact*, before he indulged himself in ridiculing it. Having spent six years in that dissenting academy to which our author is supposed to allude, I assert from my own knowledge, that his account respecting family-worship in that seminary is not true ; and that he must have been greatly *misinformed* concerning it. So far was " the day" from being " ushered in with a prayer of half an hour," that the whole time allowed for family devotion was *twenty five minutes*. A chapter was first read, unless it were very long, in which case it was usually divided ; one of Dr. Watts's psalms or hymns was then sung ; after which the Tutor prayed about *ten or twelve minutes* : the prayer was seldom extended to a *quarter of an hour*. As to Mr. Wakefield's sarcastic smiles at the short prayer before the lecture in divinity, those are welcome to enjoy it who think that inquiries after truth are better conducted without any regard to the God of truth, than with an humble dependence upon him, and a sincere desire of his direction and blessing in the pursuit of religious knowledge. With regard to " private meetings or clubs amongst the students to practise themselves in the gift of prayer," I never saw any thing of the kind, and know of no such practice among them. These things indeed are trifles, with which the attention of the reader would not have been here troubled, were it not that in all cases *truth* is preferable to *error*, or misrepresentation.

† Matth. xxvi. 36. Mark xiv. 32. Luke xxii. 41.

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heart in private to his heavenly Father. But what argument can be drawn against social worship, from his using *private* devotion, in a season of peculiar distress which concerned himself only? It was so far from being "an occasion that called loudly for sympathising and social ejaculations,"* that it is not supposable, any services of that kind from his disciples, who at *that time* were ignorant of the design of his sufferings, and the glory which would follow them, would have been of any use to him. The occasion called for more extraordinary assistance, and accordingly we find, "There appeared an angel unto him from heaven strengthening him." †

Mr. Wakefield produces "In justification of *private* prayer, and in discouragement of social worship," the following passages of the life of Jesus: *And he withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed. ‡ And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray; and continued all night in prayer to God. || And it came to pass as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him. §* The first and second of these texts only prove that Jesus prayed in private; but no inference can justly be drawn from thence "in discouragement of social worship." For how can it be inferred, that because a person does *one* action at *one* time, therefore he does not do *another* action at *another* time? As to the latter text, notwithstanding Mr. Wakefield's sneers at such an interpretation, there is as much evidence, that the disciples were with our Lord when he prayed on the occasion mentioned in it, as that they were not. In fair construction, the term *alone* in this passage, may as justly be understood to mean being only with his disciples, in opposition to his being

* Page 16. † Luke xxii. 43. ‡ Luke v. 16. || Luke vi. 12,

§ Luke ix. 18.

with the multitude ; as that he was absolutely without the company of any person, at the time he prayed. This sense would obviously have appeared, if the whole verse had been quoted by Mr. Wakefield. It reads thus, “ *And it came to pass as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him ; and he asked them saying, Whom say the people that I am ?* ” It is certain then, the disciples were near enough for our Lord to speak to them, and consequently for them to hear him praying if he used his voice. Where Mr. Wakefield got his intelligence that Christ removed from them, “ a stone’s throw perhaps,” while he prayed, he has not informed us. It is not in the text, and it cannot be supposed that either Peter or James or John have appeared to communicate this circumstance to him. This text is clearly against him ; for whatever may be intended by Jesus’ being *alone*, it was such a solitude, that it is expressly declared “ *His disciples were with him.* ” Will Mr. Wakefield acknowledge this, to be “ A single positive proof ” of social worship between Christ and his apostles ?

If he does not, the 17th chapter of John’s gospel, which Mr. Wakefield has mentioned without fully attending to it, will furnish one. An attention to the chapter and its connexion, will afford the most satisfactory evidence, that our Lord delivered the prayer which it contains, in the *society* of his disciples. It is superfluous therefore to ask, whether they joined in it. They certainly attended to it seriously, and were probably edified by it, as it is beyond a doubt that our Lord intended their edification in it. The preceding chapters narrate a long conversation between Christ and his disciples, and without the least intimation of his departing from them, the Evangelist introduces the prayer with saying, “ *These words*
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spake Jesus and lifted up his eyes to heaven." After it was ended he immediately adds, "*When Jesus had spoken these words he went forth* WITH HIS DISCIPLES ;" * which undoubtedly implies that they were with him. But we need not rest the argument on the connexion, though it be so decisive. The prayer itself, contains *internal* evidence of being delivered in company with the apostles. Our Lord expressly refers to them in the language he uses, as *present*. " And now I am no more in the world, " but *these* are in the world." † " Neither pray I for " *these* alone." ‡ These are expressions which cannot reasonably be understood, upon any other ground, than that the persons referred to in them were *present*. The same may be asserted of the following sentence of this prayer, " These things I speak in the world, that they " may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." || How could the things which our Lord said in this prayer, be a source of joy or comfort to his disciples, under that sorrow which the expectation of his departure occasioned, unless they had been present and heard them? Here then is a *direct* and *positive* proof of an act of social worship, in which Christ engaged with his apostles. Here is a prayer, and not a very short one, presented to his heavenly Father in their company. When praying for blessings in which they were concerned, he prayed with them; though shortly after, when his own peculiar situation and approaching sufferings were the subject of his devotions, he chose to be alone, as in the instance before mentioned. §

Under this head the practice of Christ, it is proper to notice, what Mr. Wakefield omitted, though very im-

* John xviii. 1. † John xvii. 11. ‡ Verse 20. || Verse 13.

§ Matth. xxvi. 36.

portant to his subject, that it was the *custom* of our Lord to attend the social worship of the Jews in the synagogues. Luke informs us that Jesus, after his baptism, "Came to Nazareth where he had been brought up; and as his *custom* was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day and stood up for to read."* It had not been customary for him *before this time*, to read and expound in the synagogue; for he had but just entered upon his public ministry, and his address to the congregation at Nazareth on this occasion, excited at first their astonishment, and afterwards their indignation.† But though it had not previously been usual with him to *speak*, it was his custom to *attend* the synagogue, in the place "where he had been brought up." It will hardly be denied, that social prayer constituted part of the service of the synagogue. If such worship were unlawful, it cannot be supposed that our Lord would have given it his countenance and support. Yet we find he not only went into the synagogue, to instruct and teach after he began to preach the gospel, but it had been, prior to this period, his *custom*; the ordinary habit of his life, to attend the public or social worship of the Jews in the synagogue.

As Christ attended the Jewish worship, so there is not wanting in the evangelical history, such strong evidence as will induce us to conclude, it was our Lord's *practice* to use social prayer with his disciples. We are informed by the sacred historian, that Jesus "Took Peter and James and John, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his coun-

* Luke iv. 16.

† See the context.

tenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering,"* It is certain the three disciples were with him, when he prayed on this occasion, for Luke says his transfiguration took place "as he prayed;" and both Matthew and Mark, in their accounts of the occurrence, say "He was transfigured before them,"† the three disciples. Upon a comparative view of the passages therefore in the three evangelists, here is no room for the conjecture which Mr. Wakefield introduced on another occasion, that the disciples withdrew about "a stone's throw." The prayer, and the transfiguration, took place in their presence; and this is another *direct* and *positive* proof of social worship, in which Christ engaged with his apostles. It will not invalidate this evidence, that Luke says, the disciples "were heavy with sleep," during part of this luminous appearance. For, whether we suppose their sleep to be the natural effect of weariness, or an extraordinary effect of the overwhelming splendor with which they were surrounded, there is no reason to suppose they were asleep when he began to pray: and their sleepiness, while he was engaged with them in social devotion, does not invalidate the lawfulness or propriety of our Lord's action in praying with them. Neither will it avail to say, This was an extraordinary occasion, and the end for which the disciples attended was, not to join in an act of devotion, but to be "eye-witnesses of his majesty, when he received from God the Father honour and glory in the holy mount."‡ For, if this were the case, and if, as Mr. Wakefield asserts, social worship be unlawful and inconsistent with Christianity, might we

* Luke ix. 28 and 29. † Matth. xvii. 2.—Mark ix. 2.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 16, &c.

not justly expect, that our Lord would have given his disciples a caution against imitating his conduct on this occasion ; lest their reverence for him, and regard to his example, should lead them to adopt a practice so unlawful and injurious as the social worship of God ! There was surely some danger that they who loved and revered their master, who acknowledged him as the son of God, would be apt to consider his conduct in religion as a pattern for them. How then, upon Mr. Wakefield's principles, can we acquit the wise and holy legislator and guide of the Christian church, of some deficiency of conduct upon this occasion ? If therefore his followers have erred in adopting social worship, may not the source of this error be traced to the practice of him, who " hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps ?" And would not the error thus be imputed to one, " in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ?" To such absurd consequences are men driven, when they argue upon principles which are indefensible.

Another instance of our Lord's using social worship with his disciples occurs in the following passage. "*And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.*" * The request of this disciple was presented upon our Lord's ending his prayer, which most strongly implies that his disciples were with him when he prayed. Our Lord's answer is accordingly addressed to them *collectively*, and not merely to the individual who had asked the question. The question itself was the natural language of an hum-

* Luke xi. 1.

ble and pious mind, impressed with a sense of the devout sentiments which Jesus had just expressed in prayer, and desirous of arriving at a similar devotional attainment. And the disciple appears to have been encouraged to make such a request, by recollecting that John the Baptist had taught his disciples a formulary of devotion.

But, what particularly deserves to be remarked in *this*, and other passages where our Lord's praying with his disciples stands recorded is, that it is mentioned in an *incidental manner*, on account of it's connexion with some other circumstance or event; which obviously leads to this conclusion, that social prayer was his ordinary practice, and therefore the mention of it was not thought necessary, otherwise than as it stood connected with something else in the history. If it had been directly and explicitly recorded, that upon a certain occasion Jesus prayed with his disciples, and such a circumstance had been mentioned merely on it's *own* account, we might conclude that this was a *deviation* from his general practice, and therefore not to be construed into an example; for, what historian would record, as a remarkable circumstance in the history of any man, an action which was frequently performed, and constituted one of the daily habits of his life? If it were recorded of the master of a family, that upon a particular occasion he prayed with his children and domestics, we should not conclude this was his ordinary practice. But, if a biographer in narrating the life of such a character should say, that *as* he was praying with his family, such or such circumstances occurred, the obvious conclusion would be, that social prayer was his *custom*, and was only mentioned as it pointed out the season or occasion, of the particular circumstance recorded in that part of the history: and it

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is *thus* the prayers of our Lord are introduced by the evangelists.

This remark, is in a great degree applicable, to the instance of Christ's praying over little children, in the presence of his disciples and others. Matthew says, "*Then were brought unto him little children that he should put his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them.*" * This was a practice conformable to very ancient custom, as may be seen in the instance of Jacob's praying over the sons of Joseph. † "There is," as Dr. Doddridge observes on the passage, "No reason to think that they were brought to Christ for the cure of some malady, for in that case it is not to be imagined the disciples would have been so inhuman as to prohibit them." Matthew indeed, does not say that Jesus did pray over them: but Mark, in relating the same circumstance says, "He took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and *blest* them." ‡ Treating them, with tenderness and compassion, he solemnly recommended them to the divine protection and favour. It is evident that this was an act of *social* worship, for there is no room to doubt, that the disciples and the persons who brought these children to our Lord were present. Has not our Saviour then, in this instance, given us not only a specimen of social worship, but an instructive and pathetic *example* of the manner in which parents, or others who have the care of young children, should, in their social or family devotions, affectionately commend them to the Father of spirits, of whom we are assured, it is not his "will that one of these little ones should perish?" §

* Matth. xix. 13.

† Gen. xlviii. 14, &c.

‡ Mark x. 16.

§ Matth. xviii. 24.

" Beneath the shield of these arguments I take my stand," and leave it to the consideration of every impartial reader, whether there be not most satisfactory evidence, from the history of our Lord as recorded by the evangelists, that it was his practice frequently to engage in *social* worship, and attend *public*; and whether the example of Christ be not a sufficient authority, for the practice of social worship among his followers.

SECTION II.

OF THE PRECEPTS OF OUR SAVIOUR.

I PROCEED next to examine Mr. Wakefield's second section, which treats " of the precepts of our Saviour;" and in which he proposes to " exhibit, 1. Such " as *directly* and *literally* prove public worship to be unauthorized by *Christianity*, and inconsistent with it: " and, 2. Such as by inevitable *inference* disprove and " condemn the practice."* After such a proposal, might we not expect some passage to be produced, in which public worship is *directly* mentioned, and condemned? " To the lover of truth who wishes to adjust " his conduct by the standard of the gospel," *such* a passage would " appear of inestimable value, and indisputable as demonstration." How great must be his surprise then, to find that Mr. Wakefield has failed to

* Page 22.

produce a single passage of this description! And that the passage on which he lays the greatest stress, has not any reference whatever to public or social worship! It is this: “ *And when thou prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*” * Christ is so far from being as Mr. Wakefield says, † “ here introduced directing his disciples, in the clearest and most unequivocal declaration that language can convey upon the *very point* of duty which occupies our” present “ inquiries,” that the passage has not the most distant relation to *this point*. And I might “ defy all the subtleties of argument” to shew, that it has any reference to *social or public* worship.

It is a good rule of interpretation, generally allowed by divines of all persuasions, and what is abundantly more valuable, dictated by every sound understanding, that the *connected* sense of scripture is its *true* sense. Let it be applied then to *this*, as it undoubtedly ought to every other passage. Our Lord in this part of his celebrated discourse on the mount, points out, and corrects, several mistakes in the vain and ostentatious religion of the Pharisees. Alms had been mentioned before: fasting follows in the subsequent part of the chapter: this passage relates to *personal* devotion. It was the practice of those jewish hypocrites, to perform even their *personal* devotion in public, standing in the synagogues, or at the

* Matth. vi. 5 and 6.

† Page 23.

corners of the streets, to be seen and admired of men as eminent devotees. Against this absurdity, calculated to flatter one of the basest passions, human pride, our Lord cautions his hearers, justly branding it with the odious name of hypocrisy, and directs them to perform their *personal* or *private* devotion in secret. But by what rule of interpretation, does Mr. Wakefield infer, that because our Lord gave directions concerning *personal* devotion he was an enemy to *social*; contrary to his own practice? Is this what Mr. Wakefield *promised*, a “direct and *literal* proof,” that “public worship is unauthorised by Christianity and inconsistent with it?” Is there a word in this passage about public worship, or any reference to it? Can an injunction to practise private prayer be a prohibition of public? Or, does it follow from exhortations to certain religious practices in some cases, that other religious practices in other circumstances are not to be observed, though there be abundant authority for them in the New Testament? Upon the same mode of argumentation, if it deserves the name, Mr. Wakefield might find a text in which we are directed to love our neighbour, and infer from it, that it was not our duty to love God, because love to him was not mentioned in that text. Can any thing be more absurd than to say, that what a passage does *not mention*, it *condemns*? Yet if Mr. Wakefield will impartially review what he has written, he will find, that it is upon this very mistaken principle he has gone, in applying the above passage in our Lord’s discourse, to public worship.

The very language of the passage shews that it is to be restricted entirely to *personal* devotion; and leaves the subject of *social* worship open, to be determined by other

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places, which have a reference to it. The language is remarkably guarded, and it might have been expected, that it would never have been so misapprehended as to be understood of prayer in general, or *social* worship. Our Lord was at this time addressing, not only his disciples, but a multitude of people. Why did he use the *singular* number when speaking of alms-giving, prayer and fasting, unless it were to shew that he spoke of *personal* actions? “ And when *thou* prayest, *thou* shalt not “ be as the hypocrites.” Had it been his design *directly* and *literally* to condemn public worship, how easy would it have been for him to use the plural number, and have said, “ When *ye* pray, be not *ye* as the hypocrites are who pray in public, but let *all* your devotions be performed in secret, and worship no more in *society*, either in your families, the synagogue, or the temple.” If he had referred to social worship, which was then common among the Jews, nothing could have been more natural, than for him to have addressed the people *collectively*; and nothing less pertinent, or more subject to misconstruction, than to speak in the *singular* as referring only to *personal* devotion. Let the reader judge now of the strength of “ This adamantine pillar,” on which Mr. Wakefield says, his opinion “ might be securely rested;” and what reason he had to “ Defy the subtleties of argument to undermine it’s base, or the force of evidence “ to throw it down.” Alas! no subtlety is here necessary. Viewed only by the eye of plain reason, his “ Adamantine pillar” appears a “ Baseless fabric;” and touched but with the finger of any man’s common-sense it totters, and falls to the ground.

Not however confiding in the strength of this pillar, though proclaimed immoveable, Mr. Wakefield has
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endeavoured to prop it up with the declaration of our Lord to the woman of Samaria. "*Jefus faith unto her; Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerufalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in fpirit and in truth; God is a fpirit, and they that worship him, muft worship in fpirit and in truth.*"* From this paffage Mr. Wakefield would infer, that "Mental devotion, and the confecration of the thoughts and affections, the heart and foul to the will of it's creator," without being expreffed in focial addreffes to him, "is the worship moft acceptable to God, and "muft be paid to the abfolute relinquifhment of every "other, by thofe who wifh to become the true worship- "pers of the Father."† But an impartial examination of the paffage will make it evident, public worship is fo far from being condemned by it, that the practice receives very confiderable countenance, and is ftrongly fupported by the language of our Lord on this occafion. Mr. Wakefield indeed allows, that according "To the literal fenfe of the former verfe, the two temples of the "Jews and Samaritans were alone intended by our Saviour." But he afferts, that in the latter verfe, "The "abolition of all temple worship, THAT IS of all public "devotion, is fpoken of."‡ If we might but introduce on all occafions our "That is," how eafily might many *obftinate* texts be made to truckle to a favourite hypothefis! How flippantly might the fcriptures be adduced to fupport the doctrines of men! And how readily might any vagary of a heated imagination, which now wanders folitarily from Genesis to Revelations "feeking reft and finding none," meet with comfortable fhelter!

* John iv. 21, 23, 24.

† Pages 25, 26.

‡ Page 25.

But unfortunately for all such hapless wanderers, there is such a thing as common-sense, which men will use when they read the Bible as well as other books. And this same common-sense comes in with an unwelcome question, and asks: What authority has Mr. Wakefield to say, that the "abolition of all *temple*-worship, means the abolition of all *public* devotion?" Or, by what rule in logic does he infer, that because public worship, under the Christian dispensation, was not to be restricted to *one* place, therefore it was not to be observed in *any* place? This is such a master-piece, such a gigantic stride in the march of inferences, that it certainly deserves to be recorded, and may henceforward stalk forth, as a courageous example to the champions of novelty. Seriously however, may it not be asked, Though men were no more to worship God by bringing thank-offerings to the Jewish high-priest, might they not by Jesus Christ "offer" the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the "fruit of their lips, giving thanks to his name?"* Though they were not to offer Levitical sacrifices in the temple at Jerusalem, yet might not Christians, according to the representation of the apostle Peter, "offer up," in the church of Christ, which is God's spiritual house or temple, "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ?"† And, does the whole of our Lord's language to the woman of Samaria, assert any thing more concerning public worship than this: That it was not to be confined to mount Sion, or mount Gerizim: not to consist of material, ceremonial, figurative rites and observances; but of rational, simple, spiritual devotion, suited to the superior excellence of the Christian dispensation, and the superior privileges of believers under it?

* Heb. xiii. 15.

† 1 Pet. ii. 5.

Let us ascertain then, whether the passage, *fairly* considered in it's connexion, do not afford a strong argument in favour of social Christian worship. The Samaritan woman with whom our Lord conversed, regarding him as a prophet, appealed to him on the question long disputed between Jews and Samaritans, whether the neighbouring mountain, or Jerusalem, were "The place where men ought to worship." * In reply our Lord spoke the above passage, in which he asserts the time was commencing, when neither that mountain nor Jerusalem should be considered as a place of peculiar sanctity, to which the worship of the Father was to be restricted : but that the true worshippers, *wherever* such should be found, in solitude or society, should worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; with real, spiritual, sincere, and acceptable devotion. Thus he informs her, as Mr. Wakefield has observed with a degree of accuracy he did not intend, that "God was providing under the new dispensation of the Messiah, a *collection* of worshippers better suited to the spirituality of his own nature than the Jews or Samaritans." † But Christ does not say, that *public* worship would be abolished ; or that men should not then worship, as they had done before, in *collected* bodies. I grant the text asserts the abolition of *ceremonial* worship, but it asserts nothing concerning the "abolition of *public* devotion ;" nor is there any thing in the passage, that could warrant Mr. Wakefield's insertion of such an expository clause, but the contrary. Our Lord's language admits the *propriety of public worship in general*, and speaks of the alteration that was to take place respecting it under the Christian dispensation. Men had worshipped in society long before that time. It had been the practice

* John iv. 20.

† Page 25.

of Patriarchs and Prophets: of righteous Kings, and pious Israelites: The tabernacle first, and afterwards the temple was the theatre where, three times in the year, the united worship of the congregation of Israel was presented to Jehovah. Christ does not *condemn* the practice, does not say worship should no more be social or public, but as formerly pious worshippers, by divine appointment were *associated* at Jerusalem, so under the New Testament wherever there should be true worshippers who worshipped the Father in spirit and in truth, their worship should be acceptable. Here is nothing then, to prohibit *associating* in worship, which was *essential* to Mr. Wakefield's argument. So far from suggesting such a prohibition, it ought to be particularly observed, that the idea of *association*, as it is included in our Lord's reference to the worship of the Jews and Samaritans, must necessarily accompany his transition to the worship of Christians, because there is nothing to give us the least notice to the contrary.—This passage therefore, impartially considered, evidently supports the practice of true worshippers who worship the Father in spirit and in truth, whether individually in their private retirements, or jointly in their social and public devotions. Yet this is a passage which Mr. Wakefield represents as *directly* and *literally* proving public worship to be unauthorised by Christianity and inconsistent with it; and which, with a kind of triumph, he calls, “An *emphatic* declaration of our master, than “which nothing more *decisive* upon” his “argument can “be imagined!”* It is indeed *decisive*, not in his favour, but to prove, that though public worship under the Mo-
saic œconomy had principally been confined to *one* place, yet under the Christian dispensation it would be accept-

ably performed in *any* place where there were true worshippers. Mr. Wakefield, notwithstanding his assumed triumph, has advanced nothing to point out the *emphasis* in it against public worship, nor favoured his readers with any substantial reason for considering it as decisive *against* the practice, though he has *confidently asserted* it to be so. It is undoubtedly easy to substitute bold assertion, or flowing declamation, for solid argument, but to "The lover of *truth*" searching after the object of his admiration, plain, connected, and forcible reasoning will be unspeakably more valuable, than the flowers of rhetoric, or the dogmas of positivity. A brilliant exhibition of fireworks may entertain and dazzle spectators, but there must be weight of metal, and a well-directed cannonade to batter down a fortress.

After such *direct* and *literal* proofs as the above against public worship, Mr. Wakefield calls our attention to such precepts of our Lord as by "*Inevitable* inference" disprove and condemn the practice." Under this head he places the following declaration: "*My yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"* This maxim he considers as inapplicable to "The *manner*, in which public worship is conducted among many sects of Christians." Surely Mr. Wakefield should have remembered it was not the *mode*, but the thing itself which he professed to attack. Admitting therefore that this text may censure some injudicious modes of worship, unless it applies against public worship in *every* mode of it, his cause can derive no support from the passage. These words of Christ are striking and beautiful, to express the mild and beneficent nature of his religion, and if applied to Christian

* Matth. xi. 30.

worship, they shew, that there is a pleasing contrast between it, and the burdensome ceremonial worship of the Jews, which was "A yoke neither they nor their fathers—were able to bear."* But a mind that can think this text, by "Inevitable inference" condemns all public worship, must surely be under the influence of some inevitable and unconquerable prejudice.—I will not waste the reader's time to follow Mr. Wakefield in the digression, introduced under the above passage, about "long prayers, cathedral services, curates, rectors, and cho—risters with cherubic faces."† It may suffice to observe in general; that if there were room for *all* the illiberal sarcasms he has introduced against Dissenters and Churchmen, their improprieties in conducting public worship, furnish no argument against the practice itself. What is there good and valuable in it's own nature, but has been and may still be abused by the folly, or the wickedness of men? All arguments derived from the abuse of things, against the lawful and reasonable use of them, are but "Solemn puerilities" not worth refuting. Vanity and ostentation‡ may take place in learning and re-

* Acts xv. 10.

† Pages 26, 27, 28.

‡ Mr. Wakefield represents social worship as ostentatious. But is there any more ostentation in a congregation's silently uniting in the petitions of him who leads their devotions, than in attending to a religious discourse? In either case there is no appearance of *singularity*, or *affectation* of *superior piety*, and therefore no more *ostentation* than in the Author's account of his own *pious temper*, from his youth; or of his *private devotions* on a certain occasion, when he tells the public: "I returned home, thank'd my MAKER with tears of gratitude for giving me in the calm studies of philosophy and religion, and the exercise of retired virtues, such an infinite superiority over the sons of ambition, venality and vice."——

Memoirs of the Life of Gilbert Wakefield, page 399.

ligion ; but this does not weaken the obligations of virtue, nor lessen the importance of literature. Fanatics may make a parade of prayers, and Pedants of Greek ; but this cannot destroy the propriety of humble rational devotion, nor detract from the honour due to the labours of a profound philologist. Granting that public worship has been disgraced with the babblings of vain repetition, the ravings of enthusiasm, and the gorgeous pomp of superstition ; this does not prove, that it may not be conducted in a simple, rational, serious, and manly manner ; or that when so conducted, it be not both scriptural and edifying.—Dismissing then a topic so inapplicable to the argument, let us attend to the next passage of scripture adduced by Mr. Wakefield.

It contains these words of our Lord : “ *But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple. The son of man is Lord even of the sabbath-day.* ” * From an attention to the “ *incidental manner,* ” in which Christ often delivered his instructions, Mr. Wakefield would lead us to think, these words intimate “ The utter insignificance of the *temple* and the *sabbath* under the dispensation of the gospel ; ” and “ The entire dispersion of “ *temple rites and sabbatical institutions.* ” † An attention to the context will shew, whether this inference *inevitably* follows from the passage or not. It informs us, that as our Lord was passing on the sabbath-day through the corn, his disciples began to pluck the ears of corn and eat. The Pharisees blamed them, as doing that which they thought unlawful on the sabbath. In reply, after referring to David’s eating the shew-bread in a case of necessity, our Lord said, “ Have ye not read in the law,

* Matth. xii. 6 and 8.

† Page 28, 29.

“ how

“ how that on the sabbath-days the priests in the temple
 “ profane the sabbath, and are blameless ? ” * This was
 a fact they were acquainted with ; and they might natu-
 rally conclude, that the services of the temple were so
 necessary and important, as to justify slaying the beasts in
 sacrifice on the sabbath-day, though the action in other
 circumstances would be unlawful. With the utmost per-
 tinence therefore Christ adds, “ But I say unto you,
 “ That in this place is one greater than the temple.” If
 the service of the temple justify that which was in itself
 unlawful on the sabbath, much more would the service
 of Christ who was greater than the temple, and in which
 the disciples were then engaged, justify them in plucking
 the ears of corn to satisfy their hunger while they were
 attending him. “ For the son of man is Lord even of
 “ the sabbath-day.” The authority of Christ extends
 over the sabbath as the head and Lord of his church ; and
 if the action of the disciples had been unlawful, the Pha-
 risees might be assured he would have censured it, with-
 out their officious interference. I appeal not to the can-
 dour, but to the justice and impartiality of the reader,
 whether this view of the passage be not abundantly more
 natural, just, and obvious, than that which Mr. Wake-
 field has given : and whether indeed there be any ground
 for the sense he would put upon it. And if so, what
 becomes of the “ Inevitable inference ” which he would
 draw from it against public worship ?

The last passage which Mr. Wakefield brings under
 the head of the precepts of Christ, is this expostulation :
*“ Alas ! for you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for you
 devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers :
 therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.”* † I will

* Verse 5.

† Matth. xxiii. 14.

admit, that this text, not only condemns the hypocrisy of long prayers for purposes of ostentation, but also censures the practice of extending prayer to an unedifying length. But when I have admitted that it censures all *such* prayers, I look around for the "Inevitable inference" by which it condemns all *public* and social prayers.—It is not in the text!—It is not in Mr. Wakefield's comment!—It is not in other commentators ancient or modern! After the most diligent search, it is an inference "No where to be found." And were we to give it an *ideal* existence, it would be

—"Fancy's child," with "Folly" for "it's father,"
 "Wrought of such stuff as dreams are; and baseless
 "As the fantastic visions of the evening."

And are these passages, for we have now examined them all, "So pointed, unequivocal, and pertinent," that it was not necessary "to dwell on less obvious arguments?"* Much were it to be wished, that Mr. Wakefield had produced those other "Passages of scripture" which he says "might be brought with great propriety in establishment of the proposition" he would recommend; for those which he has adduced, from the practice of our Lord, and from his precepts, are so greatly misapplied, so irrelevant to the subject, and so totally insufficient to prove the inexpediency and impropriety of public worship, that, to adopt Mr. Wakefield's language: "It is the excess of puerility to build *such* conclusions on *such* premises. But the drowning wretch catches even at a rush for his preservation. When I resolve to refute these allegations, I feel as much at a loss, as he, who labours to illustrate an *axiom* in *geometry*. No intermediate ideas can be discovered more

* Page 30.

“ clear and simple than those of the assertion itself :” * that the texts which Mr. Wakefield adduces afford his hypothesis no support ; though I will not be so uncandid as to add ; “ The mind that hesitates is *incapable* of information.” † We have seen that social worship was the practice of our Saviour, and is supported by his precepts as well as his example. Mr. Wakefield has justly observed, “ A follower of the example and a subject of the laws of Christ will acquiesce in nothing but some *action*, or some *precept*, unequivocally declaratory of the intentions of his Maker ; and will adopt with hesitation the conduct of the multitude,” and I may add, the hypothesis of an individual, “ *without* the precedent, “ and *against* the injunctions of his only guide and “ teacher upon earth.” ‡

SECTION III.

MR. WAKEFIELD'S ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

OUR author's third section is employed in considering some objections to his scheme, which it seems he has condescended to state, “ Merely to satisfy the scrupulous in opposition to ” his “ own judgment.” The first to which he has replied, is that which might be drawn from the address in the Lord's prayer, “ Our Father.” This perhaps ought not to be regarded as decisive upon

* Page 34.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

the subject, though it accords better with the idea of social worship than with personal devotion.—The next passage he mentions furnishes a strong objection, which he has not removed. It is this: “ *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*” * Admitting, for the sake of argument, what Mr. Wakefield has said, that patriots who meet “ In consultation upon the means of redressing grievances” in an oppressed country, would be “ Truly assembled in the name of God;” yet such a company would not be assembled in his name in the sense of this text. It speaks of persons met together for the purpose of *joint supplication or worship*. To prove this, it is only necessary to quote the passage in it’s connexion with the preceding verse. “ Again I say unto, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing *they shall ask*, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*” The twentieth verse is introduced as a reason, to shew the certainty of the promise given in the nineteenth, that the disciples should be heard in their united social petitions. All that Mr. Wakefield has said therefore under this passage, concerning an avaricious king and his insolent favourites, and arbitrary ministers, &c. is mere vague declamation, which has no relation to the object referred to by our Lord. Taking, indeed, the twentieth verse detached from it’s connexion, it might be twisted to any thing. It was prudent therefore to quote it *alone*. For, if the two verses had been recited *together*, there would have been no room to introduce the paragraph which follows the latter in Mr. Wakefield’s pamphlet, concerning “ The purposes of providence, human happiness,” and

* Matth. xviii. 20.

“ The united noises of a *parson*, his *clerk*, and congregation.” * The total inapplicability of such representations would then have been so apparent that it would have defied “ The most philosophic gravity of” the reader’s “ face to withhold a smile at the recital of such “ puerilities, unless the sentiments of philanthropic commiseration for the weaknesses of poor human nature, “ and the *pang* of sorrow at the degradation” of learning and abilities so misapplied, “ should overpower the “ propensity to merriment, and dissolve in tears.” †

Under the head of objections against his opinion, Mr. Wakefield has placed this passage. “ *And Jesus being baptized and praying.*” ‡ But as no one would think of inferring public worship from this text, it is unnecessary to take farther notice of it. Mr. Wakefield might have found much stronger passages against his views of the subject, than any he has mentioned; and, I trust, in their proper places, the reader will find such adduced, as unanswerably refute his hypothesis, and establish the obligations of public worship upon the authority of Jesus Christ and his apostles. I shall here only detain his attention to notice Mr. Wakefield’s request, to have a reason assigned, “ tolerably satisfactory, why our Saviour should omit a POSITIVE INJUNCTION” || of public worship. If no satisfactory reason could be assigned for such an omission, this would not be sufficient to invalidate the lawfulness and obligations of the practice. For when we assume in any supposed case, a right of determining what Revelation ought, or ought *not* to contain, and reject any sentiment or duty, because there may not be such accounts concerning it in the scriptures as we in our wis-

* Page 32.

† Page 36.

‡ Luke iii. 21.

|| Page 35.

dom think ought to have been given, we assume a right of dictating to infinite wisdom, and adopt a principle which, if pushed to it's consequences, would supersede the necessity of revelation. But passing this; in the present case such reasons may be assigned, why public worship was not positively enjoined by our Saviour, as are sufficient to satisfy an impartial and unprejudiced mind. Will Mr. Wakefield assign a satisfactory reason, why the scriptures no where contain a positive demonstration of the being of God? He would answer probably, it was not necessary to prove, that

————— There's a pow'r above us,
For that there is, all Nature cries aloud
Thro' all her works.

In like manner, it was not necessary the legislator of the Christian church should make a positive institution or injunction of public worship; for it had long been practised. A general idea of it's obligation was impressed on the human mind; not only among Jews but Gentiles. To appoint, therefore, that men should unite in the worship of the Deity, was not needful. To countenance it by his example, to reform the abuses of it, to shew the alterations it would undergo in conformity to the simplicity and spirituality of the new dispensation, to point out the medium by which it must be offered, and the properties it must have to render it acceptable, was all that could be requisite; and this our Lord did in his personal ministry, and by the instructions of his apostles. If Christ had positively enjoined public or social worship, it might *thence* have been concluded, that this practice was a *novelty* peculiar to Christianity, as much as the positive institutions of baptism and the Lord's supper. And, as this idea would not accord with history and facts under

der the Old Testament, we might then have been asked for a satisfactory reason, why there *should be* a positive institution in the Christian system, for an ancient practice, observed in all preceding ages, and coeval with the existence of society? If these reasons be not deemed satisfactory by Mr. Wakefield, others perhaps still more cogent will arise, when we consider the argument in favour of public worship derived from the practice of the apostles, and the nature of Christianity as a social religion designed for the social improvement of man. In the mean time I would ask Mr. Wakefield, or any advocate for his opinions, if such there be, to produce one *positive proof* from the New Testament, that CHRISTIANITY IS INTENDED TO ABOLISH THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD AMONGST MANKIND? Were it possible to produce any such evidence, it might at the same time be useful to shew the advantage that would be derived to the cause of virtue, religion, and human happiness from such an abolition.

SECTION IV.

ON THE PRACTICE OF THE APOSTLES.

AS a motto to this division of the subject, Mr. Wakefield has placed these words:

The disciple is not above his master;
Nor the servant above his Lord.

Matth. x. 24.

To

To which it is a sufficient reply to add,

It is enough for the disciple that he be *as* his master,
And the servant *as* his Lord.

Verse 25.

Mr. Wakefield would persuade us, that the practice of the apostles does not furnish any information sufficient to authorize the custom of social or public worship. He quotes the instance of the apostle's praying at the election of an associate in the room of Judas.* As this however was an address only "*half a minute long* at an extraordinary juncture," he supposes it cannot be a sufficient authority for social prayer as now commonly practised. But if he grants it to be an instance of social prayer at all, he grants what establishes the lawfulness of such a practice. For the greatest improprieties in *modes* of conducting it, do not affect the legality of the practice itself, or its general consistency with Christianity. Mr. Wakefield however is so unfriendly to social prayer, that he is unwilling to suppose the apostles of Christ would *associate* in expressing even a short request, in which their hearts were all united. "But we are" says he "perhaps too liberal in our concessions upon the passage of scripture above quoted. It is no absurd supposition, and one abundantly defensible from other writers, that the *evangelical* historian means only to state the *general sentiments* of the apostles at that time, and, the *purport* of the prayer which they *individually* presented to the Almighty."† If this supposition be not absurd, it is at least inconsistent with Mr. Wakefield's own representations. Under the precept of our Lord concerning personal devotion‡ he had told us very properly, that

* Acts i. 24.

† Page 40.

‡ Matth. vi. 5.

“ Even the use of *solitary* prayer in the synagogues, or
 “ any *public assembly* of men, is not obscurely disapproved
 “ by” that “ text,” as carrying “ an appearance of osten-
 “ tation.” * But when the apostles were assembled with
 other disciples, to choose an associate in the room of
 Judas, he represents them as using this ostentatious soli-
 tary mode of prayer, which Christ had so explicitly dis-
 approved ; and thus to countenance his system, he makes
 the apostles commence the exercise of the apostolic cha-
 racter with the breach of an express precept of Christ !

This observation respecting the use of individual or so-
 litary prayer, (which upon his own statement was a vi-
 olation of Christ’s commandment) Mr. Wakefield would
 apply to several other passages in the Acts, to which he
 refers the reader at the foot of his page. But as every
 one of these passages, which mentions the prayers of
 persons assembled together, shall be brought to prove so-
 cial worship, the consideration of them may properly be
 reserved until they occur in their due order. The in-
 stance of Peter and John going up to the temple at the
 hour of prayer † is not to the purpose, for there is no
 evidence they prayed at all upon that occasion. The
 case of Cornelius ‡ refers to the devotion of an indivi-
 dual, and does not relate to the subject. And Peter’s
 going up to the house top to pray, || only proves, that
 like his master, he chose to be alone at his private devo-
 tions ; but nothing can be inferred from it as to *public*
 or *social* worship.

As the above are the only passages which Mr. Wake-
 field has quoted, or referred to on the practice of the

* Page 23. † Acts iii. 1. ‡ Acts x. 2. || Acts x. 9.

apostles, and as there is abundant and strong evidence in their writings concerning it which he has omitted, I shall endeavour to collect what was their practice, and that of the first Christian churches, from the New Testament. In the first chapter of the Acts *, Mr. Wakefield might have found a passage more clearly in proof of social prayer than that which he cited from it: a passage which refers not to a short prayer of only "half a minute," but to the habit and practice of the apostles in which they unanimously persevered. After the ascension of Christ we are informed, the eleven apostles returned to Jerusalem and abode in an upper room, and it is added "*These all continued in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*" They unanimously persevered in prayer; and there can be no reasonable doubt entertained but this was *social* prayer. If it were said of any number of persons that they abode in one room, and with unanimity persevered in prayer, with certain others who did not reside in the place but attended occasionally, would it be possible to doubt that their prayers were social? Can it be supposed that the apostles and other disciples, like the Jewish hypocrites, ostentatiously used *solitary* prayer in the presence of one another, against the precept of their Lord? Or, if it were admitted that they did, where would then have been that *unanimity* in prayer which is so emphatically spoken of in the text? Must we not rather conclude, that they undoubtedly preferred social prayer, according to the example and practice of their Lord while he continued with them, to that ostentatious solitary prayer in public which he had so severely condemned? It will not weaken the argument from this instance of the apostolic practice to say, their circumstances were "extraordinary,"

* Verses 13, 14.

and there was a particular "urgency in the occasion." Granting that the object of their unanimous and fervent supplication, was that effusion of the Spirit which Christ had promised, this only proves, that they seriously and conscientiously adapted their petitions to the apprehension they had of their circumstances, and the divine promises. When Christians therefore now associate in praying for blessings according to *their* ideas of their own necessities, and the views they have of the promises of God, they do but imitate the primitive and apostolic pattern: and with *such* a warrant a serious and pious mind will rest abundantly satisfied.

The next instance of social prayer which occurs in the apostolic history, is that of the converts added to the church at Jerusalem on the day of pentecost. "*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.*"* Could there be fellowship without society? Were they not *associated* in attending the apostle's doctrine? Was not the breaking of bread a *social* action? What possible reason can there be therefore which should prevent our concluding, that the prayers mentioned in the closest connexion with these things, were *social* prayers, in which they united as Christians who had one common interest in the concerns of their salvation?

The prayer presented by the church, when Peter and John returned to them after their examination before the Sanhedrim,† I apprehend to be an instance of social prayer. It appears unavoidable to conclude, either that it was a precomposed form, or that every individual was immediately inspired to speak the same words, or that it

* Acts ii. 42.

† Acts iv. 24 to 30.

was a prayer delivered by one person in which the rest cordially united. It could not be precomposed, for it refers to circumstances which had just taken place in the Sanhedrim, and was delivered as soon as the two apostles had ended their account of what had passed there. It does not seem reasonable to suppose, that each person in the assembly was inspired to speak the same words at the same instant, for it does not appear there was any particular end to be answered by it, which could make such extraordinary divine assistance necessary. The only conclusion then which remains to be drawn from the passage, is that which is most strongly favourable to the common practice of social prayer. The phrase "They lifted up their voice to God with one accord," must then imply, their unanimity in the sentiments expressed by the voice of one of the company, and the usual sense of the phrase "with one accord" in the Acts, is *unanimity* in some sentiment, pursuit or object. At any rate there is no room to refer it to individual *solitary* prayer as Mr. Wakefield has done. Did the obedient apostles, and the church at Jerusalem, resemble the Jewish hypocrites who stood praying in the synagogues to be seen of men? Did they so soon forget the injunctions of our Saviour against hypocrisy and ostentation? This is not supposable in the case. If therefore the interpretation above contended for be rejected, and we recur to the only alternative which would then remain, that of their being inspired to utter the same words, it will be an instance of indecorous and vociferous devotion, which would equal the "United noises of a parson, his clerk and congregation," with which Mr. Wakefield is so much disgusted. So that in whatever way this passage can rationally be viewed, it is *social* worship still, and decisively against his hypothesis.

When the apostles proposed the choice of deacons to the church at Jerusalem, they assigned as a reason for recommending such an appointment, "*But we will give ourselves unto prayer and the ministry of the word.*"* The ministry of the word was certainly *public*; and can we suppose the idea of *public* prayer was *excluded*, when prayer was also assigned as a reason, why they wished to be disencumbered of secular concerns? Time for their private devotions might have been found morning and evening, although the principal part of the day had been employed in labours of benevolence, to comfort the widow and the fatherless. The manner therefore in which prayer is here mentioned with the ministry of the word strongly implies, that in the apostolic practice, public or social prayer accompanied the ministration of the word, to their hearers; and that they wished to be relieved from secular cares and services, that they might entirely devote the principal part of their time, to the more peculiar and important duties of their office, praying with and preaching to the people.

The same chapter will furnish another decisive instance of social worship in the church at Jerusalem. Upon the seven deacons being chosen and set before the apostles, it is added, "*And when they had prayed they laid their hands on them.*"† The apostles and deacons alone constituted a company of near twenty persons; and there is no reason to suppose that the church, or at least a great part of it, were not present on this occasion. The context shews, that the proposal of choosing deacons was made to the *multitude*, or the church at large when assembled,‡ that the multitude chose them,§ and set them

* Acts vi. 4. † Ver. 5. ‡ Ver. 2. § Ver. 5 & 6.

before the apostles, when they prayed and laid hands on them. Consequently this is another instance of public prayer in the primitive church, and another apostolic precedent for social worship. The peculiarity of the occasion does not weaken the authority derived from it for such a practice. They prayed in their assemblies according to their circumstances; Christians do the same now; and in doing so, are they not then followers of the apostles of the Lord and Saviour?

When the apostle Peter was imprisoned by Herod, the sacred historian informs us, that "*Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*"* The act of the church, the body of Christians at Jerusalem, must surely be a social act. And it appears they prayed for Peter's deliverance, not only when assembled for instruction and worship, but in private companies as they could conveniently meet. This idea is supported by the twelfth verse, which says, that at the house to which Peter went after his miraculous deliverance, "Many were gathered together praying." Were these *solitary* worshippers? Were they gathered together only to be witnesses of each other's individual and ostentatious devotions? Were they not rather *social* worshippers, seriously and devoutly engaged in offering up their *united* supplications for the apostles deliverance? And to testify how acceptable their joint petitions were to the Almighty, Peter himself is providentially conducted thither, whose presence announced that their prayers were answered.

There is no reason to suppose that the prayers of the church at Antioch, at the separation of Barnabas and Paul to the ministry of the gospel among the Gentiles,

* Acts xii. 5.

were any other than social, offered at a meeting of the church, by some of the prophets mentioned in the context. “ *And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*” * Did they retire each to his own house to fast and pray on this occasion, and then meet together only to lay hands on the two apostles of the Gentiles? Is it not, upon every reasonable principle of interpretation, abundantly more evident, that the fasting and prayer were *social* services, in which that church, under the direction of several prophets thought proper to engage, that they might solemnly commend Barnabas and Paul to the divine preservation and guidance, in the hazardous and important work to which they were called?

If it were possible however, to introduce the idea of solitary prayer in the above passage, as Mr. Wakefield suggested by referring to it, this could never be done respecting the following account of the Apostle Paul's praying with the elders of the church at Ephesus. “ *And when he had thus spoken he kneeled down and prayed with them all.*” † Why did not Mr. Wakefield refer to *this* passage? This is “ pointed, unequivocal, and pertinent” to the subject; and I will add, decisive against his position. It may well astonish his readers therefore, that when he referred to so many passages in the Acts of the Apostles in one note, this, which is so important, should have been omitted. Paul, having finished his exhortation to the elders of this church, kneeled down and prayed with them. The act of praying, the voice which spake, was Paul's, but they joined with him in this devotional address to the Deity. No words can express the idea of social prayer in a more unequivocal and definitive manner

* Acts xiii. 3.

† Chap. xx. 36.

than this passage does: and it undoubtedly behoved Mr. Wakefield to have taken explicit notice of it. It is not one from whose force he can escape by pleading peculiar circumstances. It is an instance of social prayer accompanying religious instruction. And was the practice novel? Was it a custom with which the Ephesian elders had no previous acquaintance? Was the action *unlawful*? Did the apostle act *wrong* on this occasion? If Mr. Wakefield's doctrine be true, Paul acted in this instance, in a manner "unauthorised by Christianity and inconsistent with it." Mr. Wakefield pleads for the "abolition of all public worship" amongst Christians; but when some Christians from Ephesus attended the apostle Paul, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. The positions of our author and the conduct of the apostle then are in contradiction to each other; and whether it be right, Christians! in the sight of God to follow the example of an inspired apostle, or the doctrine of a modern divine, judge ye.

The above example is quickly followed in the sacred story, by another, very similar. When Paul and his companions were leaving the disciples at Tyre, the historian says, "*And they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore and prayed.*"* What beautiful traits of friendship and piety are seen in this short passage! Not only the men, but the softer sex accompanied them, and even lisping infants staggered after their religious instructors, to receive the last benediction of their prayers. Arrived at the point of separation, they could not part without expressing their friendship for one another, and their confidence in that great Being who is the author of all

* Acts xxi. 5.

good, by affectionately commending each other to his protection. The theatre of their united devotions was the sandy beach: their prayer, the social expression of faith and love. The mutual separation of friends softened and grieved their hearts; but their hope was, the prospect of meeting again in a state of blessed immortality. On such an occasion the natural expression of the pleasing and painful, the friendly and pious sentiments which moved their breasts; could not have been very short. Whether Mr. Wakefield, had he been present, would have "yawned" or "slumbered" * I know not. But surely, a company of human beings, on the margin of the great deep, united in a devotional service, so honourable to Christianity and the finer feelings of the human heart, was a sight which angels might have beheld with mingled joy and approbation.

It was thus the apostles connected *social* prayer with the exercise of friendship, and the instructions of religion. "Excellent edifying practices! and every man, who takes upon himself the name of Christ, and professes obedience to the laws of the gospel, should have the resolution and uprightness to forsake his *blind guides* to follow him and his apostles in this path; the perfect examples of evangelical discipline and doctrine. How shall we otherwise escape the application of that awful and pertinent appeal? *Why call ye me Lord! Lord! and do not the things which I say?*" †

Further evidence of the primitive practice occurs in the epistles. Near the close of that which is addressed to the Christians at Rome, Paul requests them to pray for

* Mr. Wakefield's Enquiry, page 26. † Ibid. page 40 and 41.

him in the following words. “ *Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea.*” * If this passage be regarded only as it stands in the English Testament, perhaps it could not be certainly concluded, that the apostle wished the Christians at Rome to *associate* in prayers for his safety. But if we recollect how the safety of Peter was supplicated by the joint petitions of the church at Jerusalem, and attend to the force of the word *συναγώγασθαι* here used, it will be evident that the apostle requested them to assist him, not merely by individually praying for the same object as he did, but by uniting together in fervent *social* addresses to God for his safety: and consequently that social worship was common among the Christians of the apostolic age. If the apostle had only wished them as individuals to make his safety an object of their prayers, is it probable he would have used a compound term which contains a military allusion, and refers to the joint effort of a corps *collectedly* striving or contending for the same purpose?

In the first Epistle to the Corinthians† we find this question: “ *Is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?*” What kind of prayer does the apostle refer to? It could not be *secret* prayer, for it certainly could be a matter of no importance, whether a woman prayed in the retirement of her closet with, or without her veil. In that situation there would be no human eye to witness her conduct, and therefore the idea of comeliness or uncomeliness, as it merely had relation to the opinion of others founded upon general local custom, could not ap-

* Rom. xv. 30.

† Chap. xi. 13.

ply to private devotion. It must then be to social prayer of some kind the apostle referred. And as none of the Grecian women, except the heathen priestesses, were used to appear in public assemblies without being veiled, it would indeed have been an indecent thing according to their ideas, for a Christian woman to pray among a company of Christians without a veil, or with her hair dishevelled like a frantic priestess in a Pagan temple. That the apostle referred to a woman's praying in *public*, is evident from the fourth verse, where it is connected with prophesying; which, whether it means delivering predictions, expounding prophecies, or giving common instruction, was a social action. "Every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head." It appears then from these passages, that public or social prayer was so common in the church of Corinth, that upon some occasions it had not been unusual for a woman to engage in that part of the service, though the apostle does not seem to have tolerated the practice after this time.*

The frequency of public and social prayer among them, is farther evident from a subsequent passage. "*Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say, Amen, at thy giving thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.*" † From this passage it

* See chap. xiv. 34.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 13 to 17.

is evident that the apostle blamed the Corinthians for praying in an unknown tongue in their public assemblies, because such a practice, however sincerely performed by the individual engaged in it, was not profitable to others, who did not understand the language in which he spoke. The apostle urges it also, as necessary to the purposes of Christian edification, that prayer and singing, as well as prophesying in public, should be performed in an intelligent manner, that others might join in it with cordial assent, and as their custom was, say Amen at giving thanks. It is obvious the apostle, in the whole of this context, speaks of the exercise of their gifts in *public*, for general edification when the whole church came “to-
 “ gether into one place.” * He says therefore “ I thank
 “ my God I speak with tongues more than ye all : yet in
 “ the church I had rather speak five words with my un-
 “ derstanding, that by my voice I might teach others
 “ also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.” †
 Thus he explains what he means by praying with the understanding, and singing with the understanding. The whole passage taken together affords the most irrefragable proof that public prayer was usual in the church at Corinth, and that the apostle was an advocate for public rational prayer expressed by one person in a Christian assembly, that the rest might unite therein to their edification. Who therefore can reasonably doubt, that a practice prevalent in the apostolic churches, and supported by the apostles themselves, is an *ordinance* of Christianity, not only proper to be observed, but obligatory upon Christians of every succeeding age ?

The apostle Paul, in the following passage, requests the church at Thessalonica to pray for him. “ *Finally,*

* Ver. 23.

† Ver. 18, 19.

brethren,

*brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.** There is nothing in this language that can restrict it to private prayer. And when we consider the address of the epistle, to the church of the Thessalonians, and the conduct of the primitive churches in praying for the apostles in other cases, it is most reasonable to conclude, that it was the apostle's desire the Christians at Thessalonica should remember him in their social prayers as a Christian church. In this passage, as well as the similar one in the epistle to the Romans before quoted, it is particularly observable, the apostle requests them to pray for his temporal safety, as well as for the success of the gospel. These two passages therefore furnish an apostolic precedent, for the mention of temporal blessings in public worship, in reply to what Mr. Wakefield has objected to such a practice.

As to what he has said concerning long and particular addresses for this purpose, it does not require any direct answer. For whenever a serious and pious mind supplicates for health, prosperity, or any temporal blessings, it is always with submission to the will of God, either plainly expressed or tacitly implied; and in this view, there can be no doubt of its propriety. If, as Mr. Wakefield's language suggests, it were absolutely unlawful to pray at all for such temporal blessings, it would be equally unlawful to call in medical assistance in case of sickness, for this might be construed into an attempt to counteract the will of the deity. That we are not to seek temporal good, because natural evils or afflictions may in the end be most for our happiness, and most agreea-

* 2 Thess. iii. 1 and 2.

ble to the purposes of infinite wisdom and goodness concerning us, is a position which would apply as much against the use of means, for our recovery from sickness, or our general preservation and safety, as against prayer to the Deity for the same blessings : and were we to follow this position, it would run us into the same absurdities of practice as exist among the Mahomedans, through their mistaken application of the doctrine of the Divine prescience.

But to return more directly to our subject : the instructions which the apostle Paul gives to Timothy concerning prayer, must be understood to include the public prayers of Christians, if they do not solely relate to them. *" I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men ; For kings, and for all that are in authority ; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."* * It must be considered that Paul is here giving instruction to Timothy as a minister, whose concern it was to regulate Christian societies, and provide for their edification. The most natural sense of this passage therefore, is to understand it as directing the young evangelist, how the public worship or prayers of Christians were to be conducted. They were not to confine their supplications to themselves or their own concerns, but under the influence of that extensive benevolence with which Christianity warmed their hearts, were to pray for all mankind, and especially for the civil governors under whom they lived. This practice, while it was congenial to the benign and humane spirit of the gospel, was calculated to promote the general credit of Christianity ; and consequently the security and peace of Christians, under go-

* 1 Tim. ii. 1 and 2.

vernments hostile to the religion they professed. For when it appeared they were peaceable and virtuous men, friendly to the whole human race, and fought the peace and welfare of the communities and states in which they resided, an impression of this fact on the minds of impartial heathen magistrates, would have a natural tendency to dispose them to protect Christians, or at least leave them free from molestation; and thus they would lead peaceable and quiet lives in all godliness and honesty. And if this view of the passage be just, with what force and Divine authority does the following verse inculcate the practice of social and public worship? “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.”

In the same chapter the apostle says, “*I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.*” * Can it be supposed that when the apostle directed Christians to pray in *every place* (ἐν παντί τόπῳ) the places where they assembled were excluded? There is a remarkable coincidence between the language of the apostle in this passage, and that of the prophet Malachi in a prediction concerning Christian worship, where the same phrase is used by the Septuagint, and to which it is not improbable the apostle alluded. It deserves therefore a moment’s attention, together with our Lord’s declaration to the woman of Samaria on the same subject, as both may elucidate, and place beyond doubt the meaning of the apostle. The last of the Jewish prophets foretelling the spread of Christianity, according to the usual prophetic style, in terms borrowed from the Mosaic œconomy, had represented Jehovah as saying: “From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the “ same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and

* Verse 8.

“ in every place incense shall be offered unto my name
 “ and a pure offering.”* The legislator of the Christian church had said: “ The hour cometh, when ye
 “ shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem
 “ worship the Father. But the hour cometh and now
 “ is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father
 “ in spirit and in truth.” Upon comparing these passages, is it not natural and just to conclude, that our Lord spake of what the prophet foretold, and that the apostle enjoins what had been described by both? Incense and levitical offerings, in a literal sense, were certainly not to be presented in every place. But as the *social* worship of the Jewish church, had been paid at the temple by sacrifices and incense, so the prediction intimates, that under the Christian dispensation, in every place where the knowledge of God should come, pure and spiritual worship should be paid to him, not less *public*, nor less acceptable than that which had been before presented at Jerusalem, by the congregation of Israel. How perfectly does this agree with our Lord’s account, that the worship of the Father should not be confined to mount Sion, but performed in a spiritual manner by true worshippers wherever such should be found! And can it reasonably be doubted then, that the apostle in this direction to Timothy, refers to the *social* worship which Christians should pay “ in every place” where they assembled? commanding that it should be *pure* and *holy*. Lifting up the hands to heaven was a common and expressive attitude, anciently used in worship. Thus Virgil describes Æneas in the storm raised by Juno—

“ Ingemit, et duplices tendens ad sidera palmas,

“ Talia voce refert.”

* Malachi i. 11.

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The heathen lifted up their hands in prayer, though defiled with idolatry and vice. But the apostle directs Christians to pray in every place where they should be assembled, lifting up *holy* hands, not defiled with the impurities of superstition or the vices of sensuality; not attended with wrath or anger against their persecutors; nor interrupted by unbelieving debates or doubts, concerning the all-sufficiency and goodness of the true God whom they addressed. Holy and undefiled worship, presented to the Almighty by Christians, in every place where they assemble for religious purposes, is therefore what the apostle here directs them to pay; and is that *pure offering* which the Jewish prophet predicted, and that *spiritual worship* which the Christian legislator described.

As a farther instance of social prayer being in use among the first Christians, the exhortation of the apostle James, that the elders of the church should pray over the sick, might be mentioned.* For, admitting that the purpose for which this was to be done in the primitive church, was miraculous healing, such an exhortation would not have been given, if the practice of social prayer had been “unauthorised by Christianity and inconsistent with it.” Besides, why were the elders of the church, rather than any other of its members, directed to pray over him that was sick, unless it were, because from their office they were accustomed to engage in the duties of social worship?

The reason assigned by the apostle Peter, for the exhortation which he gives Christian husbands to behave with propriety and tenderness to their wives, if it be duly considered, will be found to refer principally to

* James v. 14.

family worship. “ *Likewise ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life,—that your prayers be not hindered.*” * If there were not all that propriety of conduct between husband and wife, which the dictates of affection and the precepts of the gospel require, this surely would not *prevent* the secret devotion of a Christian man or woman. But improprieties of behaviour between persons so nearly connected, as they might excite shame or create disgust, would probably often prevent their uniting in joint prayer in their families, to the injury and disgrace of religion among their children and other domestics. The apostle’s recommendation therefore strongly implies, that he considered family devotion as subservient to human happiness, by furnishing additional motives to virtue and the proper discharge of relative duties. It also shews farther, that in his ideas it was a matter of such importance for Christians to maintain social worship in their families, that they ought to set a guard upon the whole of their conduct, lest sallies of impatience, heart-wounding acts of unkindness, or any other improper behaviour, should indispose their minds to unite in a duty so sacred and useful. So widely different were the sentiments of the apostles and primitive Christians, on the subject of social worship, from those of Mr. Wakefield.

Thus it appears there is abundant evidence in the New-Testament, that social and public worship was practised among the apostles and the earliest Christians. And the *incidental* manner in which their worship is spoken of, or referred to in the acts and epistles, instead of weakening, *strengthens* the argument in support of the

* 1 Pet. iii. 7.

practice; because it involves in it this obvious but important idea, that social and public worship was their *general* and *uniform* practice. It could not therefore be reasonably expected, that the mention of it in the scriptures should be more explicit, or more frequent than we find it to be. Common practices are not referred to in any writings, otherwise than in such an incidental manner as particular circumstances or occasions, may require the writer to notice things, which, in any other view, it would be impertinent or unnecessary to mention: but when so mentioned, it is evident they are *common practices*, and not deviations from the general conduct of the parties. The scriptures of the New-Testament were written for the use of Christians who lived in the age when they were composed, and that immediately following it, as well as for those in the present day. Where then would have been the propriety of particularly narrating well-known facts and practices, which were continually taking place in every Christian family, and Christian assembly? Accidental, and even *oblique* references to ancient and established customs in the writers of antiquity, are in many cases more satisfactory evidence of their existence and general prevalence, than direct and positive narrations would be. Accounts of the latter description might be suspected of fabrication. But when the proof of an ancient practice arises from the accidental mention of it, or an occasional reference to it in a contemporary writer or historian, the evidence comes in that *order* and *form* which might most naturally and reasonably be expected, and is therefore most convincing and indubitable. Mr. Wakefield perhaps beyond most men could illustrate these remarks from many passages in the classics, which refer to the customs of the heathen. Let him but collect from the scriptures, the customs of the first Christians,

as he would teach us the customs of ancient nations, from the manner in which the Greek writers refer to them, and he would find, that the evidence of social and public worship between Christ and his apostles, and among the primitive Christians, arises in that way which is most calculated to satisfy an impartial and inquiring mind, while it most effectually guards against the cavils, which infidelity might object to accounts of a more direct and positive description. The ground here chosen is I am persuaded firm, and will not easily be shaken. In defence of the lawfulness and expediency of public and social worship, the practice of our Lord, the conduct of his apostles, and the usage of the first and most pure Christian churches as represented by the writers of the New-Testament, form a shield of faith which "the club of argument" cannot batter, and from which the "shafts of ridicule" fall pointless.

Mr. Wakefield however contends, that if "Public worship like ours in the present day, were customary among the apostles, this would not be a sufficient authority for us *without* the example and *against* the injunctions of their master."* Upon the article of Christ's *example* and *injunctions*, the reader is referred to what has been before advanced, with only this remark, that in the above sentence Mr. Wakefield assumes a position which he has *not proved*, and which certainly will not be granted him, that the apostles might have some things customary in their religious practice, without the example and against the instructions of their Lord. The assertion, that apostolic example is not a sufficient authority for us in religion, is not consistent with what Mr. Wakefield had said, in the paragraph imme-

* Page 41.

diately preceding the above quotation, where he called the conduct of Christ and *his apostles*, "The *perfect* examples of evangelical discipline and doctrine." Notwithstanding this evident inconsistency, Mr. Wakefield rests the strength of his cause upon it. To lessen our regard for the example of the apostles, he mentions in the same connexion the frequent reproofs they received from their master, for their "Inadequate apprehensions of the nature of the Messiah and the quality of his dispensation," and their observance of Jewish rites "whilst the temple stood." In the appendix to his new edition he also explicitly declares his opinion, that "Christianity was *imperfectly* apprehended by the apostles themselves." * To enter at present, into the *full* consideration of the apostle's knowledge of Christianity, would occupy too much room, as it must include an inquiry into the nature and *extent* of their inspiration. Some general and brief hints may, however, discover the fallacy of Mr. Wakefield's opinion concerning them. He has evidently confounded the situation of the apostles *when* ignorant of some things in Christianity, with their circumstances *after* they were enlightened with the perfect knowledge of it; which is as weak in point of argument, as if a man should deny the author of the *Silva Critica* to be a great scholar, because there was a time when he had not learned Greek. While our Lord was upon earth, the apostles were mistaken in many things concerning the nature of his kingdom, and in a considerable degree influenced by the common prejudices and mistakes of the Jews respecting the Messiah. But, WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE, that after the ascension of Christ, and the effusion of the Spirit according to his promise, to guide them into *all* truth, they were ever mistaken in their conceptions of

Christianity, or in any of the *religious* sentiments and practices they taught mankind? If they had been so mistaken, would they have been proper persons to be “ambassadors for Christ,” or to be “sent forth by him, *even as his Father sent him into the world?*” * Until Mr. Wakefield *produces* the evidence, that Christianity was imperfectly understood by the apostles, a simple denial of the position would be a sufficient reply. But our Lord’s promise † that *the spirit should guide them into all truth, and abide with them for ever*, is a demonstration of its fallacy. Either this promise was, or was not fulfilled. If it were fulfilled, the apostles had a perfect knowledge of Christian truth; for the lowest idea of the term *truth* admissible in this passage, is the truth revealed in the Christian system, which was to be the subject of their ministry. If the promise were not fulfilled, then Christ himself must have been a *false* prophet, and predicted what never came to pass. This is a dilemma which must compel our worthy author, either to recant his opinion of the religious ignorance of the apostles, or defend a position which would shake the Divine mission of Jesus Christ, and the credibility of Christianity itself.—As to the apostles observing Jewish rites, the following questions may be worthy consideration, and may shew there was a propriety and consistency in their conduct. As those rites had been appointed of God, would *Jewish* Christians have been justified in neglecting the observance of them in Judea while the temple stood, without an express warrant from God so to do? Ought not the Epistle to the Hebrews to be considered as *such* a warrant, or a proclamation from Heaven to abolish Judaism? And is there any evidence, that the Mosaic rites were observed by the

* John xx, 21.

† John xvi. 13. and chap. xiv. 16.

apostles, or any of their Jewish followers, subsequent to the date of that epistle?

To support his idea that the conduct of the apostles is not a sufficient authority for us, Mr. Wakefield adds, "What might be very proper in the *infancy* of the gospel, may be in no wise *necessary*, nay, may be very *WRONG*, at a more advanced period of *Christianity*. And this," says he, "I most earnestly inculcate; and request the attention of the reader to this *very important* point."* Accordingly he afterwards represents, that the prophet Isaiah might have replied to the Jews in his time, concerning the observance of levitical institutions, "Those performances were suited to the *infancy* of your religious state: ye are become capable of a more pure and spiritual religion: and *Jehovah* requires *now* more suitable services at your hands. And such," adds Mr. Wakefield, "is *my* reply at this day to the advocates for *public worship* upon the supposed precedent of the *apostles*; and let these advocates confute me if they can."† After *such* a defiance it is at least honourable to attempt the adventurous conflict, though one should even fall in the warfare; nor can Mr. Wakefield blame any man for accepting so bold a challenge. The whole of the above passage is indeed so extraordinary, that it merits particular animadversion. If the idea be *just*, that the apostolic age was the *infancy* of the gospel, that we are arrived at a more advanced period of Christianity, and that what was proper and edifying to Christians then, may be no way necessary, nay, even very *wrong* and hurtful *now*, there can be no harm in giving this idea its *full* force. We shall but comply with Mr. Wakefield's request if we pay particular attention to it. Let us then follow it to

* Page 41.

† Pages 42, 43.

it's consequences : some of them may perhaps be curious. According to this statement, it might be very proper for Christians who lived under the ministry of the apostles, to unite in social worship, and present *joint* supplications to the supreme Being ; but it may be unnecessary and *wrong* that in the present day we should imitate their conduct. Those who enjoyed the instructions of infallible teachers to guide them in the mind and will of God, might very properly *associate* in praying for farther light and wisdom, from the giver of every good and perfect gift ; but we are arrived at such a perfection of knowledge, that it is not only unnecessary, but *wrong* for us to adopt such a practice. *Social* devotion might be requisite, to assist the faith, and quicken the piety, of those who lived very near the time when the important and glorious facts in the gospel history took place, and were fresh in their recollection ; but we, removed at the distance of near eighteen hundred years from those facts, have such a lively sense of their importance, and our hearts are so uniformly influenced by proper views of them, that we need no such assistance. The immediate followers of Christ and his apostles, harassed by persecution, and daily exposed to tortures and death for their profession of the name of Jesus, had so many pleasing allurements to attach their hearts to the pleasures of the world, that it might be requisite they at frequent periods should assemble, to pray for preservation from it's temptations, and have their regard to heaven quickened by social devotion : but we, enjoying ease and security, immersed in commercial concerns, or at liberty to pursue our various sublunary pleasures, are so fortified by our *superior* intelligence against the lures of avarice and the incitements of sensuality, that our respective engagements need not be suspended or interrupted for family devotion ;
nor

nor do we need the influence and example of the public worship of the Deity, to awaken our regards to him. The primitive disciples were but *infants* in Christianity, and it might be very proper for them as, *feeble* children, to come *together* to their heavenly Father, and supplicate his aid; but we, being Christians of more mature growth, are able to provide for ourselves, and may do without such assistance. The gospel was a system but “imperfectly apprehended” by the apostles, who had the spirit of Christ to guide them into all truth; but Christianity macerated in the subtleties of school-men, and sublimated in the retorts of modern philosophy, is become an *etherial essence* freed from the dross and impurities of social or public worship; and we, imbibing the rectified spirit of the gospel, are “become capable” of such “a pure and “spiritual religion,” that it is unnecessary and injurious for us to *associate* in paying joint homage to the benevolent Father of the universe! Neither a regard for his honour, nor a sense of our dependence, would render such actions expedient *now*, however suitable they might be to Christianity in its *infantile* state!!—It is needless to pursue such absurdities any farther. A statement of them sufficiently refutes the position in which they are involved. Sober Christian philosophers disclaim these towering conceits. And *humble* and pious men, however divided in theological sentiments, will readily acknowledge the importance and utility, of those public devotional means and helps used by the first and purest Christians, especially in an age of which the affectation of religion is certainly not a characteristic feature. And whatever ideas some may form of the improved state of modern Christianity, in comparison with what it was in *primitive antiquity*, I am free to profess, that if we could bring back the sentiments, spirit, and practice of Christians at
this

this day, to the *simplicity* and standard of the apostolic age, Christianity, in my opinion, would be in a much more advanced state than it is at present.

I will only add to this section, which is already too long ; That the ground Mr. Wakefield has taken against public worship, would be equally defensible against the practice of reading the scriptures. Where have we any *positive* proof that Jesus Christ frequently perused the scriptures of the Old Testament ? Or where have we any *positive* precept or example for reading the New ? As to our Lord's exhortation to the Jews to search the scriptures for the proof of his being the Messiah ; might it not be said, " That was very proper for them because they doubted whether he were so or not, but can it be necessary for us in this improved state of religious knowledge ? " And as to the apostolic injunction to the Colossians, to " Let the word of Christ dwell in them richly in all wisdom," it would be as easy to say of this practice as of public prayer : " What might be very proper in the *infancy* of the gospel may be no wise *necessary*, nay may be very *wrong* at a more advanced period of Christianity ! "—Oh ! how glad would many dissolute youths educated in Christian principles be, if their consciences could but get rid of the obligation of reading the scriptures, and attending public worship together. Far be it from me to insinuate in the least, that Mr. Wakefield had any *design* to lessen men's regard to religion ; but the mistaken principles upon which his pamphlet is written, appear, in my view, as applicable to other important duties of religion as those to which he has applied them ; and consequently to have an immoral, and highly dangerous tendency.

SECTION V.

ON THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF CHRISTIANITY.

AFTER that collection of evidence in support of public and social worship, which is furnished by the practice and precepts of our Lord, the conduct of his apostles and that of the primitive Christians, it is unnecessary to add any farther argument, to prove that it is both authorized by the gospel and perfectly consistent with it. But a survey of it's conformity to the nature of Christianity, and it's tendency to subserve the noble and benevolent design for which it was introduced amongst mankind, though it be not requisite to corroborate a position confirmed by the testimony of revelation, may serve to point out the divine wisdom of such an institution, and illustrate it's importance and utility to man.

CHRISTIANITY is a divine system, distinct from every religion of human invention or appointment. The kingdom of Jesus Christ, we are expressly assured by his own declaration, "Is not of this world."* The display of the divine character by his mediation, and the revelation of the Christian hope, were intended to be the means of purifying and exalting human beings; separating them from the world, and uniting them in the public and holy profession of the gospel. From the evidence of the New-Testament it appears to be the design of Christianity, that the subjects of Jesus Christ, thus associated by faith and love, should exist in the world as a holy kingdom

* John xviii. 36.

and people, neither connected with nor supported by the powers of this world, but acknowledging the supreme authority of Jesus Christ in spiritual concerns, and united as spiritual societies, among whom the word and ordinances of the gospel should be preserved, for the general improvement of mankind, and their own advancement in knowledge and holiness to the glory of God.

Now if the public worship of God were *excluded* from Christian assemblies, how could these important designs of Christianity be so effectually answered? Where in that case would be the *visible* kingdom of Jesus Christ? Or how would a proper reverence for God, and a sense of that homage and adoration which are due to him, be preserved and extended among mankind, especially those in the inferior ranks of life? If, as Mr. Wakefield recommends, the services of religious assemblies were confined to instruction, discussion, and disputation, would not a company of persons, met together only for such purposes, resemble an academic school rather than a Christian church united for the honour of God? Would not the distinction between the church of Christ and the world, which now falls greatly short of what it was in the apostolic times, be still farther impaired? And would not numbers who frequent such assemblies, be in danger of losing the small degree of reverence they have for the divine Being, instead of having it increased? Would not the disuse of public worship also wear off from the minds of many, a sense of the obligation of worshipping God at all? And would it not thus, in an insensible manner, introduce more practical atheism than now exists?

We must take human beings as they are; and it is admirable to observe how in this view divine institutions
are

are suited to the general circumstances of mankind. The *bulk* of the people can never be divines or philosophers. We must not expect that the *majority* of men will be influenced by fine speculations or disputations. It is not instruction *alone* that will lead them to regard the duties of devotion, if they never see any appearance of devotion in public. And the consequence which must be expected to follow from its disuse, on the known operation of moral causes and effects, would be the *very general* declension of an habitual and devout regard to the Deity. But the union of publick *worship* with public instruction, is calculated to suspend and counteract these evils. By attending the social worship of others, men who are most disinclined to think, if they do not learn to reverence God and worship him in truth, cannot avoid acquiring some idea of the obligation to serve and honour him. The duty of prayer also, when it precedes public instruction, tends at least to compose the mind, and dispose it to attend to the religious ideas which may be suggested in the subsequent discourse. It keeps up a sense of God, and the obligations of worshipping him, amongst mankind. And in the *social devotion* of Christian societies, performed in a serious, rational, and scriptural manner, the being, providence, goodness, and mercy of God, are openly acknowledged in *the view* of the world to his glory. Engaged in such acts of public devotion, they peculiarly appear in their proper character as the spiritual kingdom of Christ; "an holy nation, a peculiar people."* And in *this view*, they peculiarly answer the apostolic recommendation to Christian churches, that they should "With
 " one mind, and *one mouth* glorify God, even the Father
 " of our Lord Jesus Christ."† These indeed are considerations which, of themselves, would not authorize a

* 1 Pet. ii. 9.

† Rom. xiv. 6.

practice condemned by the word of God, but when the practice is so evidently supported by it, they may elucidate its propriety and excellence.

But it is not merely the honour of God, and the general improvement of men, which is promoted by public Christian worship. It eminently subserves the religious advantage and edification of serious Christians themselves. Benevolence is indeed the grand comprehensive precept of the gospel: Love to God, and love to man, include the whole of our duty; and all the institutions of genuine Christianity, tend to form our minds to this divine temper. But where can we more directly learn to love our fellow-creatures, than when we unite with them in social supplications to that infinitely good Being on whom all depend, and who "Giveth unto all life, and breath, and "all things."* As common pensioners on the divine bounty, and joint supplicants at the footstool of Jehovah, we learn that we have one common concern and interest. And our minds must be strangely insensible, if they be not there taught to regard one another as beings of the same order; or, if our hearts do not there expand with the effusions of genuine benevolence towards all mankind, as children of the same universal parent, who have similar wants, and are liable to similar evils. Nor is it easily discernible how a person who confines his devotion to the closet, can feel the generous glow of Christian benevolence, in an equal degree with him, who frequently approaches the throne of mercy in company with his brethren, as *one* among *many* of the children of his heavenly Father.

MAN is a being formed for society, and those must have little observed the influence of *social* communications on

* Acts xvii. 25.

the human mind, who think that *no* benefit is to be derived from them in devotion. Society multiplies our pleasures, and divides our griefs. It enlivens, comforts, instructs, improves. Weighty ideas expressed in society, more forcibly impress the minds of most persons, than those they derive from books or reflection. And is it then in devotion only that society must be excluded? Or is it in this instance alone that it cannot be beneficial to man? Christians converse on religious topics important to all. Men in general converse on their common concerns and interest. By the social communication and interchange of ideas, their minds are warmed and improved on a variety of useful subjects. Can they then receive no improvement, from the social and devotional expression of important religious ideas, in solemn addresses to the Divine Being? Must they never associate in expressing their common concerns and necessities to him, who alone can supply them all? Or is it in religious worship that society loses its usual properties and effects, and ceases to act as a *stimulus*, which it does in all other cases? Is not the expression of faith and humility, confidence and hope, resignation and dedication to the Divine Being, in united addresses to him, likely, on the known influence of society over the human mind, to impress the hearts of those in whom such Christian dispositions reside; to awaken in them the renewed exercise of devotion towards God, and animate them with renewed desires of practising every Christian virtue among men? And seeing every mind is much engaged in the concerns of this world, and too much inclined to regard it in an undue degree, are not the frequent returns of the sabbath, and such opportunities of social worship, wise and merciful institutions, not only for the purpose of instruction, but for the *revival* of devotional sentiments and dispositions in our hearts; and thereby sub-

sub-serving the holy design of Christianity, and promoting the cause of virtue and human happiness; by means suited to the reasonable and *social* nature of man? I appeal to the recollection of the most serious, intelligent and rational Christians, whether they have not frequently found a sense of religion improved and advanced in their minds, not only by the instruction they have heard, but the public prayers in which they have joined on the sabbath; whether they have not returned from an attendance upon *public* devotion, better disposed to engage in the religious exercises of the *family* and the *closet*, and discharge all the duties of their station; and whether they have not carried with them, the holy consolation and influence of religion from the devotions of the sabbath, into the various concerns and avocations of the week.

What then shall we conclude from these things? Or what sentiment, on a review of the subject, should we form of the expediency, and obligations of public and social worship? If we regard the example and precepts of Christ: if we follow the pattern of the apostles and primitive Christians: if we respect the authority of the scriptures: if we would advance the improvement of the world, the cause of true religion and the honour of God: if we would promote our own true interest, or that of our fellow-creatures: in short, if we would act as Christians or philosophers, according to the dictates of revelation, or the principles and springs which are known to influence the human mind, we shall zealously support the public worship of God in the world. While we may, and *ought* to seek its purification, from every debasing and disgraceful mixture which has been blended with it, by the weakness, the folly, or the superstitions of men, let us zealously contend for its observance, support

it by our influence and example, and join in it with sincerity and truth.

So congenial is *social* worship to the nature of man, and the tendency of the gospel : so far is it from being unsuitable to an *improved* state of religious knowledge and purity, that the scriptures represent rational beings when arrived at the highest degree of perfection as engaged therein. The grand end of Christianity, and of the increase of knowledge and holiness, is to prepare us for the *heavenly* state ; and social worship, with only the alteration suited to such a change of circumstances, is described in the word of truth, as the work and employment of *heaven*. The inhabitants of that better world, according to the account in the Revelations, are engaged in religious services similar to those in which we spend our sabbaths upon earth. “ They are before the throne of “ God, and *they perform divine service to him* * day and “ night in his temple. † ” “ And all the angels stood “ round about the throne; and fell on their faces and wor- “ shipped saying, Amen! blessing, and glory, and wisdom, “ and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, “ be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen ! ” ‡ That which will constitute the sacred and delightful work of the general assembly and church of the first-born in the

* So Dr. Doddridge renders *λατρευουσιν αυτω* ; and it is very certain the word generally signifies in the New-Testament to serve with *worship*. Stockius says of the verb *λατρευω*, indicat *cultum religiosum*, ut idem sit ac *divina et religiosa veneratione colere*. He refers to the following passages ; where it is rendered worship in our translation. Acts vii. 42.—chap. xxvii. 14. Phil. iii. 3. And to many others where the idea of worship is evidently contained, though that term be not used by our translators, as Acts xxvi. 7. Rom. i. 9. Heb. xii. 28.

† Rev. vii. 15.

‡ Ver. 11 and 12.

celestial temple, cannot be mean, unprofitable, or unsuitable to the most improved state of religion upon earth. Let us not then entertain any depreciating ideas of the obligations and utility of social devotion and worship, which, if we are found hereafter among the most pure and happy of human beings, will be a part at least of our employment in heaven.



THE END.

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